



Buffalo Lake scheme too costly, study says

By Ashley Geddes

(Herald Edmonton bureau)

EDMONTON — A plan to boost the water level in Buffalo Lake near Premier Don Getty's country estate will cost more than it's worth, a study shows.

A consultant's study released Wednesday estimates the economic benefits at \$2 million less than the \$13.1 million project's cost.

The cost-benefit analysis in the study by Environmental Management Associates shows that most of the quantifiable benefits of the project would accrue to existing

and future cottage owners near the lake.

Getty, who built a home overlooking the lake after winning a byelection in the Stettler riding, shrugged off opposition criticism of the project, saying it's still being reviewed and no final decision has been made.

But New Democrat environment critic John McInnis questioned why the government is pushing ahead with a project that's a loser from an economic point of view.

McInnis noted the study shows nearly all of the \$11 million in

economic benefits will go to property owners in the vicinity of the lake.

McInnis asked Getty in the legislature to justify why taxpayers' money is going "to support a project which is an economic loser and benefits only the property owners in the area."

But Speaker David Carter prevented Getty from answering the question, saying: "That's not within your responsibility to answer."

Later, McInnis said it's clear the only reason the government is pursuing the project is because the premier lives on the lake.

McInnis noted that numerous previous studies showed the project wasn't advisable, and could cause algae growth on the lake.

The government only resurrected the project after Getty moved into the area, McInnis said.

Environment Minister Ralph Klein announced Wednesday a three-man panel will conduct public environmental hearings on the project.

But McInnis argued the project should be reviewed by the province's new Natural Resources Conservation Board, established to review the environmental impact of development projects.

Getty said the NRCB is not ready to proceed with its mandate, adding "this item has all the documents and all the information to go ahead."